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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

30 June 1982

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NOTE FOR: Ted Atkeson, NIO/GPF

FROM : Hal Ford, AC/NIC

SUBJECT : Your Memo (23 June 1982) on Soviet Global Military Strategy

Ted, a few quick, brief reactions.

1. The subject is a most legitimate one. The NIC should publish on it, but not be in a hurry to do so. There is a very long way yet to go in carefully defining, researching, thinking through, drafting, and discussing the questions involved -- a thorough approach, that is, one similar to that of the Atlantic Bridge exercise.

2. In this case much care will have to be given to defining the paper's concept and then sticking to it. The present draft raises a few of the right questions, but its central subject matter remains elusive as the text moves from subject to subject. Linc has developed this point eloquently; I share his views.

3. I am sure that the general question has been addressed by many U.S. minds over the years -- perhaps not always explicitly as "horizontal escalation" -- and that previous studies discussing or at least touching the subject are tucked away in assorted files in DoD, the JCS, SAGA, State, NSC, DDI, Rand, etc. Careful search should be made in any case, plus considerable exchange of data and judgments among the best people who've grappled with such questions, in and out of government. All available intelligence should be examined, too, including all the available Soviet literature relevant to the subject.

4. In the process of so refining a NIC study we'll need to clarify for the reader the state of our knowledge. Do we know this and that about the Soviet view? Or, do we largely have to infer it? Also, is there a (singular) Soviet view? Or, are there significant known differences among Soviet leaders on these questions? Or, differences from one time to another?

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5. Another subject which will have to be treated most carefully is how fixed is the Soviet view (or views) on these subjects? Or, how scenario-dependent? There will always be an array of terribly important variables attending any possible Soviet decisions for or against horizontal escalation. For example, what is the nature of the particular US-Soviet "direct clash" in question? Where is it? What have been its causes? What other players? How do Soviet leaders assess the success/failure of the efforts they have already made there? How well does each side read the intentions of the other at the time? What commitments of pride and force have already been made? What level of intensity has already been reached in the "clash" with US, and in particular what kinds of weapons have or have not already been employed? Not least, how confidently can US intelligence judge how Soviet leaders -- regardless of their pre-existing views and plans re horizontal escalation -- would respond to the actual situation, to the US' actual moves to date (in the "clash" area and otherwise), and to Soviet estimates of impending US moves? I assume that these questions are similar to those the draft is talking about, in capsule, on p.9: "The greatest risk of war [expanded or nuclear war?] stems from the possibility of differing assessments of relative interests and of relative potency and apparent will in pursuing those interests." In any event, such questions will want to be developed with great care.

6. I infer that an underlying judgment of the draft, surfaced in several places, is that Soviet leaders are not necessarily pell-mell about escalation, horizontal or vertical, but act from a deep sense of concern not to loose major US or allied military action against the USSR, and would accordingly be disposed to behave with considerable caution in scenarios such as those the text raises. There may be much to be said for such judgments concerning the thinking of Soviet leaders, but such a tone does not jibe either (a) with that of the present draft NIE 11-4 (its initial version, at least), which seems to picture a surprising degree of relative Soviet calm about the US military threat; or (b) with some of the US rhetorical assessments these days of Soviet conduct. Whatever the case, the NIC will want to be consistent in what it has to say.

7. Perhaps the most difficult ingredient a NIC study will need to include concerning Soviet thinking and scenarios is the interrelation of horizontal and vertical escalation. There is a certain air of unreality about a paper which poses possible Soviet horizontal escalations, yet says little if anything about the overriding question of possible nuclear escalation of an already existing US-Soviet "direct clash." Treatment of this key question will have to be ground carefully into a NIC study both in general terms, at the outset of the paper, and in its scenarios as well.

[Redacted]
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